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To my parents

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Preface

Comparisons between the contemporary economic slump and previous phases of prolonged depression in industrial capitalism's 200-year history have stimulated renewed interest in the theory of economic long waves. My own interest in the theory and its implications for our understanding of uneven regional development within the industrial capitalist economies stems from the winter of 1978–9. At that time I was reading Ernest Mandel's influential *Late Capitalism* while preparing a paper on regional planning in a period of economic decline as part of my undergraduate course in urban and regional planning at Oxford Polytechnic. One of the most novel features of Mandel's work was his reformulation of a long-wave perspective of capitalist development within the Marxist tradition. Mandel's thesis provided me with an intellectual rationalisation of what I already intuitively knew to be true. The deepening economic crises since the early 1970s, marked by widening interregional inequalities and accelerating inner urban decay, represented more than a temporary downturn in British capitalism's fluctuating fortunes. They reflected major structural shifts in the patterns of social, economic and spatial development. The collapse of the fragile 'Keynesian consensus' with the onset in 1979 of the deepest recession since the 1930s, accompanied by the return of mass unemployment and the election of a Conservative government committed to a monetarist deflationary programme, confirmed my fast-hardening views about the nature of these structural changes.

Much of mainstream regional analysis at that time remained preoccupied with theories of 'structural convergence' that were becoming decreasingly pertinent to contemporary spatial development. It was in this context that I became attracted to Marxist and other critical theories of spatial development which were the first to apprehend the changing nature of Britain's socio-economic geography. My undergraduate dissertation examined the changing

nature of the 'regional problem' and regional policy responses since 1945, relating these changes to the underlying shifts in the direction of capitalist development with the evaporation of the post-war expansionary long wave. After graduating in 1980 I continued my research at Birmingham University's Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, intending to take a more comprehensive look at the process of regional development in Britain since the Industrial Revolution. The long-wave theory was to occupy a much more prominent place in this project, whose results are presented here.

During this time I was fortunate to experience life in a region where the changing patterns of industrial development were nowhere more dramatically evident. I was fortunate, which is more than can be said for the people of the West Midlands region where some 300 000 joined the dole queue in the four years it took to write this book. This real and immediate experience had a direct bearing on my academic research. I became increasingly dissatisfied, not only with the oft-repeated view of the Right that 'There Is No Alternative', but also with the interpretations of many Left theorists who reduced local patterns of economic change to the perverse and remorseless machinery of global capital accumulation. This approach excludes the possibility of any scope for self-determination by local communities in shaping the course of their own development. One central purpose of this book is to suggest that, both theoretically and historically, socio-economic forces based in particular localities can play and have played an important role in determining wider patterns of development. During the past eighteen months I have again been fortunate to work for the West Midlands County Council's Economic Development Unit which, along with many other like-minded local councils, is developing and implementing positive local alternatives to industrial slump, mounting unemployment and social debilitation.

The ideas in this book have, then, been subject to a variety of influences, academic, personal and political. I am particularly indebted to Mrs Barbara M. D. Smith at Birmingham University's Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, who supervised my research and suffered the unenviable task of reading and re-reading drafts. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Barbara for her constant advice and encouragement throughout the prepara-

tion of this study. My thanks are also due to the staff and students of the Centre for incidental guidance and suggestions; to the Social Science Research Council, which funded this study; to Birmingham University Centre for Computing and Computer Studies for use of their facilities; to former colleagues at Oxford Polytechnic who inspired many of the initial ideas for this work; to my friends and colleagues at the West Midlands County Council's Economic Development Unit; and to Ron Martin, the series editor, for his encouragement and support. I have my best friend and brother Adrian to thank for sustaining my morale over the past four years. I am not married and I type my own work.

Birmingham

MICK MARSHALL

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